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Facts About the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

TEFAP is just one of the many food donation programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), under the Food Distribution Program.

The Food Distribution Program has a twofold purpose. First, it improves the diet of a large cross section of the population: children through the National School Lunch Program, the Child Care Feeding Program, and the Summer Food Service Program; elderly persons through the Title III Elderly Nutrition Program; needy persons in charitable institutions; needy persons in households on or near reservations; and others in need of food assistance.

Second, it helps strengthen the agricultural market for food that American farmers produce. To aid farmers, USDA buys food under price-support and surplus-removal legislation and makes this food available to States and Indian reservations. USDA pays for the initial processing and packaging of the food and for transporting it to designated points within each State. State distributing agencies are then responsible for storing the food, transporting it throughout the State, and distributing it at the local level through appropriate organizations to the ultimate recipients.

WHAT DOES TEFAP DO?

TEFAP gives needy Americans, including unemployed and other low-income persons, USDA-donated foods for household use. The foods are free; recipients must meet certain eligibility criteria.

TEFAP is authorized by Title II of Public Law 98-8, as amended (the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Act of 1983). The first program of this type began in December 1981, when Congress affirmed USDA's authority to donate surplus products directly to needy persons in households through nonprofit organizations and food banks. With implementation of the Food Stamp Program on a nationwide basis, such donations had been discontinued after June 30, 1974.

WHAT FOODS ARE AVAILABLE?

Food distributed by TEFAP has been declared surplus after certain other commitments have been met by USDA. Items vary from time to time depending on the agricultural market. The foods distributed under TEFAP may include cheese, butter, nonfat dry milk, cornmeal, flour, honey, rice, and other products. USDA provides these foods in package sizes that are suitable for household use.

HOW DO TEFAP FOODS REACH RECIPIENTS?

In each State, USDA enters into agreements with the agency responsible for administering the program. The State agency selects public or nonprofit emergency feeding organizations such as food banks and soup kitchens, and delivers the foods to them. These organizations then distribute the food to persons who have met State-established need criteria.

Besides buying the food, processing and packaging it, and shipping it to the States, USDA also provides funds to State agencies to help defray costs incurred by them or by local organizations. These funds may be used to store and distribute the food. At least 20 percent of these funds must be reserved for use by the local feeding organizations to help meet their costs in giving the food to needy persons.

HOW IS LOCAL DISTRIBUTION ADVERTISED?

In many cases, information about distribution and eligibility can be found in local newspapers or over the radio. The day-to-day program operations are administered by the State agency. Anyone having questions concerning eligibility to participate or needing further information concerning area distributions should contact:

This is an equal opportunity program. If you believe you have been, or anyone has been, discriminated against because of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or handicap, write immediately to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.